


Planning Campus Events

 Homecoming and other seasonal events are important traditions at many colleges and universities. Unfortunately, all too often these traditional events become associated with heavy alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems on campus and in the surrounding community. Some colleges and universities have begun to change traditional campus events or begin new, alternative campus traditions in order to reduce these problems.

Changing Traditional Events

The University of Arizona (UA) is one school making changes to campus events that have been traditionally associated with drinking. Alcohol consumption has historically been a prominent part of UA's Homecoming activities. In the past few years, however, UA has made significant changes in Homecoming policies and practices as part of an overall campus effort to demonstrate decreasing tolerance for alcohol abuse on campus.

Policymakers at UA are working toward campuswide environmental change. For example, policy changes have prohibited alcohol brand advertising on campus. Additionally, the dean of students has taken a strong stance to enforce alcohol policies with all student groups, and the President's Office has made a commitment to develop alcohol policies that are consistent across student, faculty, alumni, and community activities.

To develop a clear, consistent, and enforceable alcohol policy, UA formed an Alcohol Policy Committee, chaired by a member of the President's Office. Committee members include representatives from the offices of alumni, athletics, Greek life, dean of students, general counsel, neighborhood association, and Homecoming, as well as the police, the campus health center, and student organizations. One focus of the committee was to recommend changes to alcohol policies that could be implemented for Homecoming 1995. To this end, the

committee developed a plan over nine months and then presented it to the President's Cabinet, which includes the chair of the faculty, deans of the colleges, provost, and vice presidents. The committee's recommendations for change were strongly endorsed by this influential body.

As a result of the Alcohol Policy Committee's work, three main strategies were employed at Homecoming 1995, together with an earlier starting time for the football game. The first strategy aimed at regulating drinking at the pregame Homecoming event. Each year, campus organizations set up large tents to provide refreshments and activities. To regulate drinking in these tents at Homecoming 1995, bartenders only could serve alcohol, a maximum of two alcoholic beverages could be served to an individual at one time, displays of large quantities of alcohol were limited, and kegs were prohibited from the tent area.

The second strategy involved communicating these new alcohol policies to the campus and Homecoming participants. These requirements for alcohol service and safe party practices were clearly stated and repeated frequently in planning meetings, along with other rules for sponsoring tents that served alcohol, such as the requirement for liability insurance.

The third strategy was to swiftly enforce the alcohol policies and have security and committee members visible at Homecoming. Security personnel were employed to look for policy infractions and to report immediately to the alcohol committee any violations of the rules by bartenders. However, no formal reports

Recommendations from UA for Making Positive Changes to Campus Events

- Maintain a public health stance on substance abuse issues and avoid debate on the morality of alcohol. Many on the UA committee first thought reduced alcohol meant no alcohol and, as moderate drinkers themselves, they did not want to be hypocritical.
- Identify as allies people who share the goal of reducing violence, public disturbance, and liability. Assist others on the committee with their agendas.
- Work through senior administration to reach the highest level of decision making. Support from upper-level administrators can help achieve positive changes.
- Conduct polls or brief surveys to provide the committee with campus and community opinions on the place of alcohol in university events. This can provide valuable information to give to those who fear that event participants will resist positive changes.
- Assume good intentions and try to understand the positions of those who may resist change. Frequently refer to data from your own college or university that focuses on good health, safety, and reduced liability.

were received, which could be an indication that the presence of security personnel limited the incidence of infractions.

These policy and environmental strategies resulted in a decrease of alcohol-related problems at Homecoming 1995 compared with the previous year. Observational data indicated a decrease in alcohol-related problem behaviors, such as visible intoxication and pushing. Comparisons of campus police statistics revealed that, between 1994 and 1995, traffic citations

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PREVENTION UPDATES

decreased from 202 to 105, neighborhood complaints from 10 to 3, stadium ejections from 4 to 1, and verbal warnings on liquor from 47 to 0. In addition, despite an increase in the overall number of tents, the number of tents serving alcohol actually decreased.

Beginning New Traditions

The Sunday before classes began at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) had become the traditional occasion for thousands of students to gather and drink heavily in the on-campus fraternity courtyard and at off-campus bars and parties. In 1997, UNC organized Fall Fest, an alcohol-free street festival, as an alternative way for students to meet and begin the new academic year.

Fall Fest was a free event open to all members of the UNC community, students, faculty, and staff, although planners had expected that mainly first-year students would attend. In fact, Fall Fest became the "place to be" on that night; an estimated 5,000 students attended the event. Organizers observed that many returning students who would normally have been in the fraternity courtyard or at off-campus parties came instead to Fall Fest.

During the event, entertainment and activities ran continually from 9 P.M. to 2 A.M.. Free soft drinks, pizza, subs, hot dogs, popcorn, and ice cream were available. Student leaders, professors, administrators, and UNC's chancellor served 63 gallons of ice cream during the event. Organizers incorporated components of a pep rally into Fall Fest; the marching band played, and the football coach spoke during the event. Fall Fest entertainment included performances by bands, campus a capella groups, step shows, and demonstrations by sports teams. Students could also participate in sports activities or play carnival games. Prizes such as airline passes, T-shirts, and campus performance tickets were given out to students in attendance. In addition, many UNC clubs and organizations set up information tables so that students could get involved in campus activities during the upcoming year.

Plans for Fall Fest began after the Chancellor's Task Force on Substance Abuse recommended that alcohol-free social events be organized at UNC. The university was especially interested in planning alternative events for first-year students, who are often vulnerable to the misperception that they must drink to fit in.

Many different groups on campus became involved in organizing Fall Fest, including the Student Union, Orientation Office, Department of Intramural and Recreational Sports, the Office of Public Safety, and the Department of Athletics. Funding for Fall Fest was contributed by different campus groups, and the organizers also received many donations. For example, one major pizza chain and the alumni association provided the pizza for the event. Local companies also donated water and soft drinks.

Organizers of Fall Fest at UNC believe that student involvement is critical to planning a successful alternative event. They recommend that students be involved both in assessing the current situation and in shaping the event activities. At UNC, students such as the orientation leaders and RAs played a key role in organizing Fall Fest. The Greek community was also supportive of the event.

No alcohol-related urgent care visits occurred at the UNC student health services, compared with eight visits the previous year, and 19 alcohol-related events were held on and off campus that night, compared with 30 the previous year. Only a handful of students participated in the fraternity courtyard drinking, in contrast with 5,000–6,000 participants the previous year. Off-campus bars reported a decrease in business, and the crowd near the bars was observed to be much smaller than in past years. UNC received very positive press coverage from Fall Fest and now has a first-year class with a new alcohol-free tradition. Organizers feel that the event exceeded their greatest expectations. UNC plans to continue Fall Fest and to expand its alcohol-free community events.

As these examples show, changing traditional campus events or starting new alcohol-free traditions can be an effective way of reducing alcohol-related problems. In addition, the example of Fall Fest demonstrates that with effective planning, alcohol-free events can be very popular with students and other members of the campus community. Heavy alcohol consumption, urgent care visits, and alcohol-related problem behaviors do not have to be the aftermath of a traditional campus event.

For additional information, contact:

The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention,
EDC, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02158-1060
800-676-1730 HigherEdCtr@edc.org <http://www.edc.org/hec/>

Resources

For more information about the prevention efforts described above, please contact:

Organizations

University of Arizona

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Publications

Responsible Hospitality Service. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, 1997. Available from the Higher Education Center.

This prevention update discusses elements of a successful college responsible hospitality service program and lists resources for planning such a program.

Special Event Planner's Guidebook.

Sacramento, CA: California Coordinating Council on Responsible Beverage Service, 1996. Available from the Higher Education Center. This book has guidelines for planning an event that incorporates responsible beverage service and also provides checklists of action steps for event planning.

